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SUBJECT: "ELECTION 2008" PROGRAMS DIVERTED ROAD TO THE WHITE HOUSE
THROUGH AUSTRIA

11. (U) Summary: The 2008 presidential election proved to be an excellent and sustained opportunity for PAS Vienna to reach and influence audiences across Austria. Recognizing keen interest in this year's historic election, post utilized the full range of public diplomacy vehicles - speakers, videoconferences, cultural programs and more - to inform Austrians about the U.S. election system, politics and policies, and core American values. Informal feedback from co-sponsors and audiences throughout the year was consistently positive and thankful. Targeted programs for teachers and schools were particular highlights, as their continuing interest in understanding the U.S. election was pronounced. These programs, as well as the optimistic atmosphere they helped generate, provided excellent opportunities to renew relationships with Austrians whose passions for America had cooled or even soured during the past several years. End summary.

12. (U) Since beginning its "Election 2008" programming in earnest in December 2007, PAS has organized at least 35 visits to high schools and universities, 15 speaker programs, seven digital videoconferences (DVCs) for media, dozens of interviews, and numerous electronic program briefs, e-journals and website postings. Our comprehensive "Election 2008" outreach efforts culminated in a boisterous election watch party on November 4-5 for 600 contacts, including numerous journalists. The party included a mock election (no surprise: Senator Obama was the clear winner), an explanation of the electoral system by Ambassador Girard-diCarlo, and numerous media interviews. The Ambassador personally granted several interviews, including a live stand-up with national broadcaster ORF-TV early on November 5. After a year of election programming, PAS calculates that we directly reached a total audience of 6,500 and, through media coverage of our events, postings on our website, and further distribution of materials, hundreds of thousands more. Here's a rundown:

HAVE SPEAKER, WILL TRAVEL.

13. (U) PAS hosted 15 speakers in several cities, attracting hundreds of political experts, academics and students as well as representatives from the media, the government and business communities. Speakers addressed topics ranging from the mechanics of winning the White House (Prof. Robert Schmuhl of Notre Dame) to the personalities and politics of the 2008 campaign (Amy Walter of CNN). One speaker, Chan Lowe, an editorial cartoonist with "The South Florida Sun-Sentinel" newspaper, spoke candidly on the connections among free speech, satire and political cartooning. His audience of journalists, political scientists and students was greatly extended by media coverage, including an interview with liberal-left "Der Standard" newspaper's online edition and an English-language radio interview. Equally well-received and well-covered by the media were presentations by the New America Foundation's Steve Clemons on the impact of the Internet and new media on the election.

14. (U) In addition to IIP and target-of-opportunity speakers such as resident Fulbright professors, embassy officials - including the Ambassador, DCM, the Counselors for Public Affairs and Economic and Political Affairs and their staffs - gave presentations, hosted roundtables and engaged in Q & A sessions with students. Tapping into new media, the Ambassador participated in an hour-long on-line lunchtime chat hosted by centrist "Die Presse," one of Austria's premier newspapers on October 31. He chatted with 14 participants (many more were in the queue) while 1,600 others read along.

ELECTION FOCUS: TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

¶5. (U) Austrian youth were particularly interested in the election and faculty demand for embassy speakers remained high. At least ten embassy officers and interns participated in PAS-organized visits to three dozen or so schools and universities throughout Austria. They discussed the primaries and the political landscape, the Electoral College and voting patterns, campaign financing and advertising, and other topics with nearly 2,000 students. Feedback was uniformly positive and many schools have requested post-election presentations. Embassy Economic/Political, Foreign Agriculture, Consular and other colleagues were especially energetic in meeting these requests, providing young Austrians with invaluable and informed insight about American democracy, politics and policies.

¶6. (U) PAS also focused on teachers of English and American Studies. Forty teachers, for instance, attended a two-and-one-half-day workshop on the American political process and the 2008 election led by Harvard University Associate Professor of Government D. Sunshine Hillygus. Punctuated by vigorous debates, the participants found the workshop rewarding and vowed to share the lessons learned with their colleagues and classes. In addition, for much of the year, the American Reference Center has included election-oriented materials in its monthly electronic newsletter for teachers (circ. 800) and has distributed topical e-journals and DVDs to more than 1,000 teachers.

THE MEDIA'S INSATIABLE APPETITE

¶7. (U) During the past year, Austrian media have provided regular, in-depth coverage of the U.S. presidential campaigns. Indeed, the U.S. election at times received greater, timelier and more detailed coverage than the Austrian national election on September 28, 2008. In response, PAS organized a series of digital videoconferences for small groups of influential editors and journalists. Scheduled to coincide with milestone events such as primaries and the conventions, the seven DVCs enabled Austrian journalists to directly engage Washington experts, political analysts and leading journalists in nuanced discussions. The insights gained were often reflected in post-DVC reporting for Austrian media consumers.

¶8. (U) Besides hosting the DVCs and providing local media with opportunities to interview speakers and embassy officials, PAS also facilitated visits to the United States for Austrian journalists. The foreign editor of a regional daily, "Tiroler Tageszeitung," (circ. 109,000), for example, participated in an election tour organized by the Washington Foreign Press Center. As a result, the journalist was able to provide his western Austrian readership with a current, in-depth analysis of the campaign process, describing everything from the nuts-and-bolts of campaign finances to the atmosphere at a political rally.

INTERNET AND CULTURAL PROGRAMS

¶9. (U) PAS posted its "Election 2008" page on the embassy's website in October 2007. Since then, it has logged more than 17,000 viewers, making it the second-most popular page after the English language portal. In addition, the American Reference Center distributed election-oriented program briefs, e-journals, newsletters, article alerts and other documents to thousands of recipients, many of whom share these documents with others.

¶10. (U) In the cultural realm, PAS cooperated with the Austrian Film Museum on several film-and-politics programs. We screened, for example, "The Manchurian Candidate" and "Dr. Strangelove" and held panel discussions, such as the one featuring Smithsonian Institution curator James Deutsch and the Oscar-winning Austrian film maker Stefan Ruzowitzky ("The Counterfeiters") which attracted hundreds of movie buffs. In addition, PAS supported the exhibition "Our America?" organized by the Mauthausen Committee. Through film, photos, documents and objects, this exhibit in downtown Vienna explored elections and pivotal events in 20th Century America. More than 1,500 students and faculty visited it.

¶11. (U) For supporting PAS's election programming, post wishes to thank all Washington elements, especially Cathy Siemonh, Melissa Jarrett and their IIP speaker program colleagues; IIP/WV's Sandy Bruckner and colleagues; the Foreign Press Center's Keith Peterson; as well as EUR/PPD officer Kerri Hannan and successor Ashley White. Our success was yours as well. We look forward to working together just as energetically to explain the new Administration and its priorities in 2009.

UNDERCUTTING ANTI-AMERICANISM

12 (U) Comment: Segments of the Austrian public and press disagree with some current American policies and attitudes toward the United States and its society can be quite critical. PAS, however, found that its election programming was well-received and, for the most part, met with no anti-Americanism. Thus, not only did PAS' "Election 2008" programs meet audiences' and media's desire for information and insight into the election, they enabled the Mission to emphasize America's core values of democracy, equality and freedom and to renew relationships with members of Austrian think tanks, the media and other institutions that have cooled during the past few years.

¶13. The presidential campaign (and election) of Senator Obama especially thrilled large swaths of Austrians. The American election process, with its twists and turns, rules and peculiarities, personalities and controversies, absorbed Austrian media and their audiences. In post's view, our programs on this great exercise in democracy highlighted the best in America and helped undermine negative stereotypical views of the United States and its society. End comment.

Girard-diCarlo#